

California Youth Connection
Jaci Davis
Testimony of the Youth

My name is Jaci Davis and was in the foster care system for over twelve years. I emancipated out of the system in the summer of 2001. While in the system I was in many different placements from foster homes, into group homes, and eventually into correctional facilities. As a youth I was always filled with anger and had many issues dealing with my anger and learning how to communicate my feelings. I had a huge wake up call when I was sixteen and soon after entered a live-in rehabilitation center. The locations of the placement that I lived in were very unorganized over the years. I had many placements that were out of county homes and soon after moved out of state into a foster home. My seventeenth and eighteenth birthdays were spent at the Santa Clara Children Shelter and during that time I tried to prepare myself for emancipation. I graduated from the Transitional Housing Program and moved in with a good friend who also is a member of California Youth Connection. Currently I work for the Bill Wilson Center teaching other youth Independent Living Skills and go to school at night at San Jose City College...hopefully I will be attend U.C. Berkley in the near future.

One of the memories that I feel I still suffer from today is the lost years without my sisters. We were all separated when I was twelve. I was never reunited with my older sister and it wasn't until I was out of the system did I see her once again. My younger sister and I reunited in the out of state foster home when I was sixteen, right after my release from the rehabilitation center. Because of the time that we had spent apart we had both grown into two very different people. Way too often do officials that decide a youth's placement discard the bond within siblings and choose to separate them instead of trying to find a placement for them. At first when we were separated it was just across town, but soon our homes became in another town or county. Social workers rarely attempt to find the youth sibling. I system is so confusing in its self that is understandable why someone would just give up looking. I strongly enforce the need for more sibling visits and the push for more homes for siblings.

Another big obstacle that I was forced to over come was in relation to my transition in society. Many cuts have been made to different programs within my county. After my eighteenth birthday I was forced to ask Judge Edwards to extend my dependency until I had an opening in the Transitional housing program. Because of the lack of room and availability I stayed almost four months after my eighteenth birthday at the shelter. I believe that if more money was set aside specifically for transitional uses this would help out very much with the homeless rate in Santa Clara County. There are very few places for a youth to go after their emancipation. In our county there are only four homes for single

young adults, there are almost two hundred youth emancipating from the system every year, how is that even close to equivalent?

I propose that the policy-makers that have the authority stop cutting the budget of foster care youth. Many youth, myself included, do not have parent or supportive people to turn to for help, for many these program is all the help they have. I also propose that we try to educate the public more about the foster care system and the false stereotypes of Foster Care Youth. I believe that if the public found out the harsh reality that most of these young people face on a day to day basis that their hearts will no longer be filled with fear but with compassion. There are too many false labels on youth especially foster care youth, too many mental barriers that both society and youth program for themselves. The youth growing up around negative things and adults telling them that they will never amount to anything, there is no wonder in my mind why so many youth fall threw the cracks.

I do believe that the opportunities for youth to speak their minds and say what they mean but I don't think that many youth know about them. I was fortunate enough to be stuck in the children shelter with nothing else to do but attend CYC or work. Many youth on the street aren't around the right places to hear about positive things and speaking opportunities. I think that we, as a community, need to reach out to those youth in their time of need and turn something ugly into something beautiful. Outreach is needed disparately for all of those youth not on the right path. The youth are the future; it is our responsibility to secure the future in our communities and of our great nation.